

****ATTENTION****

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Habitat management for

MALLARDS

In the State of Washington

The mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*, because of its size and fine flavor, is the most sought after species of waterfowl in Washington, particularly east of the Cascades. It is the most common nesting duck in Washington and the local flocks are supplemented by large migrations from northern areas in the fall. Many mallards remain in Washington during the winter wherever open water and food are available.

HABITAT NEEDS 1/

Water. This is an essential element to all kinds of ducks. Mallards and the other species of ducks known as "dabblers" or "surface-feeders" (as separated from "diving" ducks), prefer shallow ponds, small streams, lakes, and flooded fields. Mallards utilize water for drinking, resting, loafing, mating, and rearing of young.

Food. Mallards prefer to feed by "dabbling" in shallow water. They can reach 15 or 16 inches deep without submerging completely. They often fly several miles to upland fields where cultivated grains are available. The most dependable method of attracting ducks to a place is to grow a crop of barley, buckwheat, bulrush, corn, millet, wheat, sorghum, oats, or smartweed which can be flooded one to fifteen inches deep during the fall and winter. This generally requires a low dike and suitable water control systems.

1/ The habitat requirements of gadwall, pintail, shoveler, and teal (blue-winged, cinnamon, and green-winged) are similar to those of the mallard. Widgeon (often called baldpate) have habits similar to those of the other dabbling ducks except that they feed on clovers, red fescue, wheat, and widgeongrass more than other species of ducks.

Natural foods which are most attractive are arrowhead, barnyardgrass, bulrush, pondweeds, and smartweed. Mallard broods feed heavily on aquatic insects.

Cover. Ducks require special vegetative cover during the seasons of nesting, rearing broods, and adult moult.

Courting, pairing, and mating habitat (mid-winter and early spring, before nesting activities): Requires little or no vegetative cover, as these activities are generally performed on small open-water areas with bare shorelines.

Mating habitat, defended as a "territory" by the male, usually is one or several small, shallow, open-water ponds (usually temporary runoff-type) in fields, pastures, or marshy lands. Water depths of such ponds generally are less than six inches and may disappear within 10 to 14 days.

Nesting habits and habitat (about March and April--May for other dabblers). Mallards nest on the ground, usually within 100 yards of water, but sometimes as far as a mile away, in medium-height vegetation such as alfalfa, redtop, and other grasses. The hen selects the nesting site and lays 8 or 10 eggs, which are incubated for 26 days after the last egg is laid.

Habitat for rearing the broods (May to early September). Immediately after the young are hatched, the hen leads them from the nest to a water area three or more feet deep, surrounded by or interspersed with marsh plants such as bulrushes, sedges, cattails, and other aquatic plants.

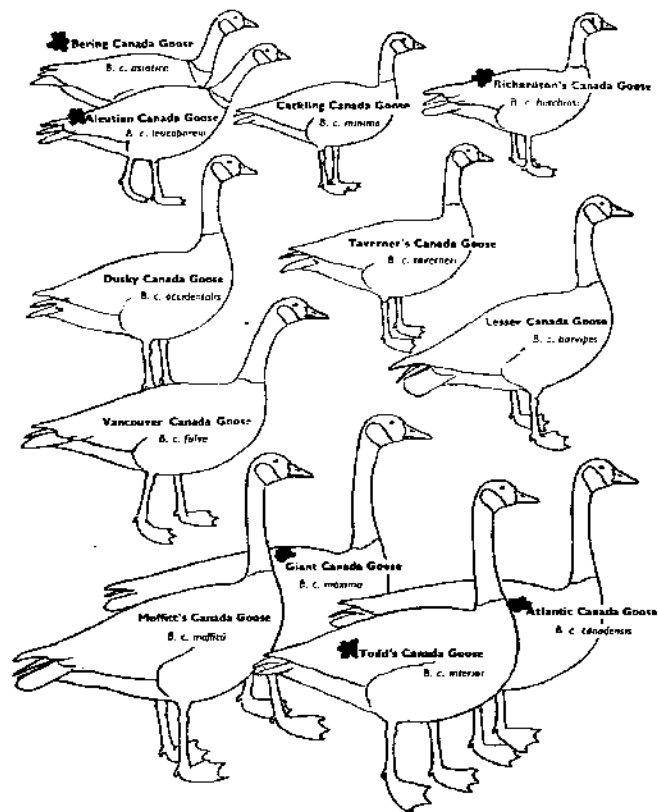
Loafing sites. Mallards spend a great deal of their time loafing, sunning, or preening themselves on mud flats, knolls, or small islands. Water areas can be made more attractive to mallards and other ducks by creating supplementary loafing sites with small islands, floating logs, rafts, or bales of hay or straw.

Grazing. Exclusion of livestock from lake and pond areas does not ordinarily improve mallard habitat. Limited grazing removes some of the dense vegetative cover, which ducks avoid, and generally makes the area more attractive. Over-grazing to the extent that nesting cover is destroyed or nests trampled should be discouraged.

HUNTING

Hunting on small areas should be limited to one day a week and only 2 or 3 hours a day so that mallards will not be driven away. Refer to State and Federal regulations governing waterfowl hunting.

Refuge or resting areas should be provided on large units if hunting is practiced every day or every other day.



ALL IN ADULT PLUMAGE
VIII. Canada Geese

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*Does not occur or is not common in Washington.

